

**INTERNATIONAL SECURITY / MIDDLE EAST UPDATE**  
**March 21 - 27, 2013**

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**1. [Kerry, Karzai on "Same Page" Regarding Taliban Contacts](#) (03-26-2013)**

By Phillip Kurata  
Staff Writer

Washington — Secretary of State John Kerry says the United States and Afghanistan are “on the same page” regarding an Afghan-led peace process involving contacts with the Taliban.

“We are completely cooperative with the government of Afghanistan with respect to the protection of their interests and their people, and our efforts to continue to help their army to be able to deal with extreme terrorists who are still trying to kill people in Afghanistan,” Kerry said in a press conference with Afghan President Hamid Karzai in Kabul March 25. “We’re on the same page.”

Karzai said he is planning to travel to Qatar soon for talks with the emir of Qatar about the Taliban opening an office there for the purpose of negotiations. “We want to encourage those who come to Qatar on behalf of the Taliban to begin to talk with the Afghan Peace Council as soon as possible,” he said.

The secretary said the United States is committed to an “enduring partnership” with the Afghan people as they seek “a secure and democratic nation.”

Kerry noted that Afghanistan is going through three types of transitions simultaneously: security, political and economic.

The security transition involves the transfer of security issues from NATO-led forces to Afghan forces by the end of 2014. "We are helping Afghanistan to have the ability to defend itself. Afghanistan will have one of the largest armies in the region: 352,000 troops," Kerry said. "So Afghanistan is proving its capacity right now that it can and will defend itself."

"The national security forces of Afghanistan are fully prepared to protect their country, and they consider the transition as a good step and for the benefit of both Afghanistan and for the United States," Karzai said.

During the secretary's visit, the United States handed over authority for the prison at Bagram Air Base to the Afghan government. "It is closely linked to our sovereignty, and our sovereignty has to be exercised," Karzai said.

Kerry said that for the political transition to succeed, it is vital that the Afghan presidential election in 2014 be conducted in a way that is credible, safe, all-inclusive, transparent and accountable. "It is our hope that this election is going to be a unifying moment for Afghanistan, and that it will represent, in a sense, the crowning achievement of the president's vision for Afghanistan when he peacefully transfers power to a newly elected president," Kerry said.

The secretary said a successful economic transition will ensure that the security and political transitions succeed. He noted the rapid gains Afghanistan has made since 2003. "In the last decade, the gross domestic product of Afghanistan has nearly quintupled. Health facilities like hospitals have quadrupled. Access to electricity has tripled. Life expectancy is up 50 percent. A recent United Nations report showed that Afghanistan has made faster gains in human development over the last 10 years than any other country in the world," Kerry said.

Karzai said Afghanistan is ready to negotiate a bilateral security agreement with the United States that will reflect Afghanistan's sovereignty and independence.

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[Kerry and Afghan President Karzai in Kabul](#)  
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## **2. Hagel, Russian Counterpart Discuss Mutual Security Issues (03-26-2013)**

American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, March 26, 2013 – Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoygu made a congratulatory call to Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel, and the two leaders discussed a range of issues, Pentagon Press Secretary George Little said yesterday.

Hagel and Shoygu discussed the ongoing security transition in Afghanistan, Little said in a statement.

"Secretary Hagel assured his counterpart that the handover of security responsibilities is progressing as the capabilities of the Afghan national security forces continue to improve," he added.

Hagel said the United States would keep Russia and all concerned apprised throughout the process, and he encouraged close bilateral cooperation on other issues, including Syria, North Korea and Iran.

"Minister Shoygu expressed his desire to reconvene missile defense discussions with the U.S. at the deputy minister level," Little said. "Secretary Hagel agreed and reiterated that this is an important part of U.S.-Russian relations."

Hagel assured the minister that these discussions would continue and be carried forward by Undersecretary of Defense for Policy Jim Miller, the press secretary noted.

"Secretary Hagel expressed his appreciation for the call, as well as his desire to continue close coordination on a range of global issues," Little said.

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[DOD News Release Statement](#)

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### **3. North Korean Threats Help No One, Pentagon Official Says (03-26-2013)**

By Claudette Roulo  
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, March 26, 2013 – The newest threats by North Korea follow a well-worn pattern designed to raise tensions and intimidate others, Pentagon Press Secretary George Little said today.

According to news reports out of North Korea this week, long-range artillery and strategic rocket units have been ordered to prepare to deploy.

The United States is concerned by any activities on the Korean Peninsula that could raise tensions, Little said in a meeting with reporters. "It's not just artillery," he noted. "North Korea has nuclear capabilities, so the full range of their arsenal is of concern to the United States and to our South Korean allies."

North Korea's threats help no one, Little said, and serve only to further isolate North Korea and undermine international efforts to ensure peace and stability in the region.

The decision earlier this month to place 14 additional ground-based interceptors at Fort Greely, Alaska, and Vandenberg Air Force Base, Calif., was based in large part on growing threats from North Korea, Little said.

In addition to the recent mobilization order, in recent months North Korea has conducted nuclear testing, placed a satellite into orbit and continued development of its intercontinental missile program. "The facts are that the North Koreans are developing their missile capabilities in violation of international law and norms of international behavior," Little said, "and they need to stop."

The chairman of South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff and the U.S. general who commands the U.S.-Republic of Korea Combined Forces Command announced March 24 that they had signed a combined plan to counter threats from North Korea. The classified agreement is led by the South Korean Joint Chiefs of Staff and supported by U.S. Forces Korea, Little said. The agreement is part

of a robust architecture supporting a larger joint planning effort that has been under way for some time, he added.

"We are moving forward to take new steps on a combined command and control structure for the U.S.-South Korea alliance," Little said. The counter-provocation plan serves as a representation of the continued development of strategic, operational and tactical cooperation, he said.

"It improves our combined readiness posture and allows immediate and decisive response to any North Korean provocation," Little added.

"It's very important that we do everything we can to stabilize the peninsula and not take rhetoric to where it shouldn't go," he said, "and that's what the North Koreans are doing right now, and that should cease."

The United States takes everything the North Korean government says and does seriously, Little said.

"We continue to urge North Korean leadership to heed the president's call to choose a path of peace and to come into compliance with North Korea's international obligations," he added.

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[Officials Sign Plan to Counter North Korean Threats](#)

[Hagel: U.S. Bolstering Missile Defense](#)

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#### **4. Admiral Stavridis Presses for More NATO-Russia Dialogue (03-25-2013)**

By Donna Miles  
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, March 25, 2013 – Noting increased cooperation between NATO and Russia in several key areas, the top NATO and U.S. European Command commander emphasized today the importance of working through stumbling blocks in what he called a "complicated partnership."

In a blog post, Navy Adm. James G. Stavridis cited concerted efforts by both parties since NATO's 2010 summit in Lisbon, Portugal, where the alliance's 28 heads of state and government agreed on the need to pursue "a true strategic partnership" between NATO and Russia and noted in the strategic concept that they expect reciprocity from Russia.

Stavridis recognized several areas where increased cooperation has shown signs of paying off: counterpiracy; support for the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan, military exchanges and training exercises, counterterrorism and counternarcotics, among them.

"Overall, we enjoy cooperation and some level of partnership in a variety of important areas," he said. "On the other hand, there are clearly challenges in the relationship."

Stavridis noted Russia's objections to the European phased adaptive approach for missile defense. "Russia sees the NATO missile defense system as posing a threat to their strategic intercontinental ballistic missile force," he said. "We strongly disagree, and feel that the system is clearly designed to protect populations against Iran, Syria and other ballistic-missile-capable nations that threaten the European continent."

NATO and Russia also disagree over Russian forces stationed in Georgia and NATO's role in Libya, Stavridis said.

"We maintain that we operated under the U.N. Security Council mandate to establish a no-fly zone, provide an arms embargo and protect the people of Libya from attacks," he said, calling NATO's actions "well within the bounds of the U.N. mandate and the norms of international law."

"Russia sees this differently," Stavridis continued, "and whenever I discuss this with Russian interlocutors, we find little room for agreement. This tends to create a differing set of views about the dangerous situation in Syria as well."

Stavridis noted Russian Ambassador to NATO Alexander Grushko's stated concerns that these differences -- and the installation of NATO military infrastructure closer to Russia's borders -- threaten to unravel progress made in their relations.

"Notwithstanding differences on particular issues, we remain convinced that the security of NATO and Russia is intertwined," Stavridis said, quoting the NATO strategic concept agreed to in Lisbon. "A strong and constructive partnership based on mutual confidence, transparency and predictability can best serve our security," it states.

Stavridis recognized areas in which the growing NATO-Russian relationship is bearing fruit:

- Counterpiracy: Loosely coordinated efforts by NATO and Russian ships have reduced piracy by 70 percent over the past year and caused the number of ships and mariners held hostage to plummet in what the admiral called "a very effective operation."

- Afghanistan support: Russia contributed small arms and ammunition to the Afghan security forces and sold MI-17 helicopters and maintenance training to the Afghan air force. In addition, Russia provides logistical support, including a transit arrangement that helps to sustain NATO-led ISAF forces and redeployment efforts.

- Military exchanges and exercises: Russian service members are participating in more of these engagements with the United States and NATO. These exchanges, including port calls in Russia, have been well-received by both militaries, Stavridis noted.

- Arctic cooperation: Russia is collaborating with other members of the Arctic Council, including the United States, Norway, Denmark, Canada and Iceland, to ensure the Arctic remains a zone of cooperation.

- Counterterrorism: In the lead-up to the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, Russia, NATO is offering assistance and information-sharing via a variety of channels, Stavridis reported.

- Counternarcotics: NATO and Russia are working together to stem the flow of heroin from Afghanistan, a high priority for Russia.

Expressing hopes that NATO and Russia can continue to build on this cooperation, Stavridis said areas of tensions and disagreements need to be addressed.

“No one wants to stumble backwards toward the Cold War, so the best course for the future is open discussion, frank airing of disagreements, and hopefully seeking to build the ‘true strategic partnership’ set out in the NATO strategic concept,” he said. “Clearly, we have some work to do.”

Biographies:

[Navy Adm. James G. Stavridis](#)

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[U.S. European Command](#)

[Special Report: U.S. European Command](#)

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## **5. Hagel Welcomes Karzai's Commitment in Detention Facility Pact (03-24-2013)**

American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, March 24, 2013 – Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel called Afghan President Hamid Karzai yesterday after an agreement was reached to transfer control of the Parwan detention facility to the Afghan government tomorrow, Pentagon Press Secretary George Little reported.

In a statement released after the call, Little said the agreement follows an intensified round of discussions between U.S. and Afghan officials.

“The secretary welcomed President Karzai's commitment that the transfer will be carried out in a way that ensures the safety of the Afghan people and coalition forces by keeping dangerous individuals detained in a secure and humane manner in accordance with Afghan law,” Little said.

Hagel also appreciates the hard work of all of those on both sides who worked to finalize the agreement, Little added.

A memo of understanding signed in March 2012 set the transfer in motion. Marine Corps Gen. John R. Allen, commander of U.S. and coalition forces in Afghanistan at the time, called the memo “an important step forward in our strategic partnership negotiations.”

Biographies:

[Chuck Hagel](#)

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[U.S., Afghanistan Agree to Turnover of Parwan Detention Facility](#)

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## **6. Austin: Afghanistan, Engagement Remain Centcom Priorities (03-22-2013)**

By Jim Garamone

American Forces Press Service

MACDILL AIR FORCE BASE, Fla., March 22, 2013 – The war in Afghanistan and maintaining contacts throughout the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility will be Centcom's continuing mission, Army Gen. Lloyd J. Austin III said here today after taking the command's reins.

Austin received the Centcom flag from Marine Corps Gen. James N. Mattis, who will retire after a four-decade military career.

The general assumes command at a time when American troops are still in combat in Afghanistan and the outcome of the Arab Spring remains unknown.

Austin praised the men and women of the command for their expertise and professionalism, noting that in the last decade, the command has fought two wars thousands of miles from America's shores. He also thanked the representatives of 60 nations who have fought alongside America's finest.

"All 60 nations are continuing to play an integral role in what we do at this unique headquarters and throughout the Centcom area of responsibility," he said.

All that the military has accomplished in Iraq and Afghanistan is incredible, Austin said, but he added that he'll leave the final word to historians.

"The fact is, the full story has not been written," he said. "That said, these are historic times and challenging times, and much more will be required of us in the days ahead, for the world that we live in remains complex and extremely volatile." Much of that instability is in the Central Command region.

Calling Afghanistan his top priority, Austin pledged to do all he can to ensure the success of the mission there. The United States and its allies will continue to work with the Afghans so their security forces can protect their own people, and this commitment will continue beyond the end of 2014, when Afghan forces will have full security responsibility for their country and the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force mission ends.

The United States must remain engaged in the Middle East and Central Asia, Austin said. "We must remain mindful of the fact that success in our various critical endeavors will require the efforts of many -- indeed, all -- of us, working together," he added, noting that the leaders and people of the region want to help to find solutions for the problems.

The general cited the Arab League and the Gulf Cooperation Council as just two organizations that can work toward peace in the region. "The U.S. will continue to play an important role as a key partner to our friends and allies," Austin said. "We will provide them with the necessary support, and we will stand ready and willing to hold accountable those who would threaten the regional stability and security through their actions or through the actions of proxies."

Biographies:

[Army Gen. Lloyd J. Austin III](#)

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[Austin Takes Central Command Flag from Mattis](#)  
[Marine General Bids Farewell to Centcom Family](#)

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## **7. Obama: "No Shortcut" to Sustainable Mideast Solution (03-21-2013)**

Washington — President Obama said the United States is “deeply committed” to the creation of an independent Palestinian state and a future where Palestinian rights will be respected, but he urged Palestinian leaders to resume direct negotiations with Israel without preconditions and for both sides to have the courage and determination to pursue peace.

In remarks with Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmoud Abbas in Ramallah March 21, Obama said the Palestinian people deserve a state of their own that will offer them dignity, security, opportunity and “a future of hope” for their children.

“We seek an independent, a viable and contiguous Palestinian state as the homeland of the Palestinian people, alongside the Jewish state of Israel — two nations enjoying self-determination, security and peace,” he said.

But “the only way to achieve that goal is through direct negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians themselves. There is no shortcut to a sustainable solution,” the president said.

There is no point for negotiations if the expectation is that outstanding issues between both sides will be settled ahead of time, he said.

If there are constant negotiations “about what's required to get into talks in the first place, then we're never going to get to the broader issue, which is how do you actually structure a state of Palestine that is a sovereign, contiguous, and provide the Palestinian people dignity, and how do you provide Israel confidence about its security,” Obama said.

These “are the core issues,” whose resolution will solve other outstanding problems, including Israeli settlement activity in the West Bank, he said.

The president said a successful outcome of talks will require all sides to “think anew” and break away from old habits and old arguments that have been blocking progress.

“We cannot give up on the search for peace, no matter how hard it is,” Obama said. “My administration is committed to doing our part” to help close the gap between Israelis and Palestinians.

The president welcomed progress by President Abbas and Palestinian Authority Prime Minister Salam Fayyad in building the institutions of a Palestinian state, and said that as the single largest donor of assistance to Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, “the United States is a proud partner in these efforts.”

Despite “extremely challenging circumstances,” the Palestinian Authority has become “more efficient and more transparent,” with new efforts to combat corruption and encourage economic development and entrepreneurship in the West Bank, Obama said.

Along with helping the PA bolster its finances, U.S. assistance will help “strengthen governance, rule of law, economic development, education and health,” Obama said. The United States considers these projects as investments in a future Palestinian state and in peace “which is in all of our interests.”



The president said young Palestinians and Israelis deserve a better future than a life continually defined by conflict, and peace will open new opportunities for both to thrive.

“One of the striking things, one of the ironies of this conflict is that both the Israeli people and the Palestinian people are extremely entrepreneurial. They have a keen business sense. They could be hugely successful in helping to lift up the economy of the region as a whole,” he said.

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[Obama, Israeli President Peres at State Dinner](#)

[President Obama’s Speech to the People of Israel](#)

[Obama, Palestinian Authority President Abbas in Ramallah](#)

[Obama, Israeli PM Netanyahu’s Joint Press Conference](#)

[Obama, Israeli President Peres After Meeting](#)

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## **8. U.S. Envoy on U.N. Investigation of Chemical Weapons Use in Syria (03-21-2013)**

Statement by Ambassador Susan E. Rice, U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations, on the UN Investigation into Chemical Weapons Use in Syria, March 21, 2013

The United States welcomes today’s announcement by United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon regarding an investigation into the possible use of chemical weapons in Syria. The United States supports an investigation that pursues any and all credible allegations of the possible use of chemical weapons in Syria, and underscores the importance of launching this investigation as swiftly as possible. We demand the full cooperation of the Assad regime in particular, as well as Syrian authorities throughout the country, including by providing full and unfettered access to all relevant individuals and locations. In addition, humanitarian workers seeking to assist injured individuals should be given complete access to provide medical care and assistance as needed.

We call on the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons to provide full support to the UN’s investigation, including information, expertise, and resources. As the UN proceeds with these efforts, we will also continue to work closely with our partners to obtain further information regarding any and all credible allegations of the potential or actual use of chemical weapons in Syria.

President Obama has been clear that the use or transfer of chemical weapons is totally unacceptable. If Bashar Al-Assad and those under his command make the mistake of using chemical weapons, or fail to meet their obligation to secure them, then there will be consequences. Those responsible will be held accountable.

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